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Report of the Secretary-General on the deployment of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to paragraph 17 of Security Council resolution 1828 (2008), of 31 July 2008, by which the Council requested me to report every 60 days after the adoption of the resolution on the deployment and operations of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID), the political process, the security and humanitarian situation in Darfur and the compliance of all the parties with their international obligations. The report covers the months of December 2008 and January 2009.

II. Deployment of UNAMID

2. As at 31 January 2009, the total strength of UNAMID military personnel stood at 12,541, including 11,893 troops, 387 staff officers, 181 military observers and 80 liaison officers. This figure represents 64.13 per cent of the mandated strength of 19,555 personnel. The expansion of UNAMID's military component during the reporting period was due to the arrival of an infantry battalion, a multirole logistics unit, a transport company and a reconnaissance company all from Ethiopia and an engineering company from Pakistan.

3. The strength of UNAMID police personnel stood at 2,639 (1,940 police advisers and five formed police units totalling 699 personnel), representing 41.02 per cent of its mandated strength of 6,432. The increase in police deployment was due to the arrival of two formed police units of 140 personnel each from Nigeria in December 2008.

4. As at 31 January 2009, the number of civilian personnel stood at 3,129 out of an approved strength of 5,557, representing 56 per cent of authorized capacity. This includes 855 international staff, 2,013 national staff and 261 United Nations Volunteers. There are also 311 additional staff members (103 international, 71 national and 137 United Nations Volunteers) under recruitment and 120 new staff on travel status. UNAMID continues to face serious challenges in recruiting and retaining staff because of the security risks and threats involved in working in Darfur, as well as the harsh living and working conditions. During the reporting period, 15 staff members departed UNAMID owing to resignation, reassignment or completion of appointment. In addition, since the establishment of the mission, 109 selected candidates have declined offers of appointment.

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5. The rotation of the 10 former African Union Mission in the Sudan infantry battalions that began in October 2008 has been completed. Additional contingent-owned equipment for six of these battalions is scheduled to arrive in the first half of 2009. In order to bring all battalions to the required United Nations standard strength of 800 personnel, additional personnel arrived at the time of the rotation, and eight battalions are now at full strength. It is expected that the two remaining battalions, from Senegal and South Africa, will be at full strength by March and May 2009 respectively.

6. The pace of movement of equipment from El Obeid and Port Sudan improved greatly with the arrival of one L-100, one AN-12 and one IL-76 aircraft under the bridging arrangement for temporary air support and two IL-76 mission aircraft on long-term charter. These aircraft are undertaking intense operations to ferry loads for further distribution by surface or rotary-wing aircraft to outlying locations. This effort of aerial delivery is being supplemented by road and rail movements and using door-to-door shipment contracts. Consequently, considerable progress has been made in delivering contingent-owned equipment and United Nations-owned equipment to different locations within the mission.

7. The airlift of oversized cargo from Rwanda at no charge to the United Nations by the United States of America on 15 and 16 January 2009 was a welcome initiative that helped to ensure the delivery of urgently required heavy logistics vehicles for the Rwandan contingent. This equipment enabled the contingent to perform the critical task of moving other pieces of equipment in the region. Owing to the absence of good roads into Darfur, I encourage other Member States to follow this support initiative for strategic and urgent airlift of contingent-owned equipment.

8. The deployment of military engineering units, the hiring of local employees who had previously worked for the former logistics contractor, Pacific Architects and Engineers, and the engagement of local contractors have greatly enhanced the mission's engineering capacity. In addition, UNAMID is working with the United Nations Office for Project Services on a memorandum of understanding to enhance UNAMID's capacity to construct community policing centres.

9. Despite the arrival of additional troops and enabling units, the mission's actual operational impact has been limited by logistical constraints, inadequate supply of critical equipment and the continued absence of key military enabling units such as the medium transport units, an aerial reconnaissance unit, a level-II hospital and 18 medium utility helicopters. In this context, the offer of five tactical helicopters by Ethiopia represents a welcome development.

10. One area of particular concern relates to the readiness to deploy personnel by troop- and police-contributing countries. A wide range of contingent-owned equipment still needs to be procured by a number of these countries. In addition, personnel need to be adequately trained and prepared prior to deployment and capacity, systems and materials for maintaining contingent-owned equipment in Darfur must be put in place and remain fully operational for units to sustain themselves. In this regard, the state of maintenance of contingent-owned armoured personnel carriers is of particular concern and needs to be improved to provide robust mission force mobility.

11. The troop-contributing countries that are currently preparing to deploy or are in the process of deploying units or contingent-owned equipment to UNAMID are

Burkina Faso, Egypt, Ethiopia, Nepal, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa, Thailand and the United Republic of Tanzania. The police-contributing countries that are projected to deploy formed police units to the mission are Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, the Congo, Egypt, Indonesia, Jordan, Nigeria, Senegal, Togo and Uganda. The deployment of these military and police units will provide UNAMID with operational capabilities required for the effective implementation of the mission's mandate. I am particularly concerned about the early deployment of the infantry battalions from Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Senegal, Thailand and the United Republic of Tanzania, which, taken together, would constitute a significant increase in the mission's troop strength and thus its protection capability and ability to implement its core mandated tasks. I call on these countries to take urgent steps to accelerate the deployment of the battalions and have directed the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Field Support of the Secretariat to take all steps required to facilitate the predeployment preparations of troop- and police-contributing countries.

12. Many of the troop- and police-contributing countries require donor assistance in procuring the equipment needed to accelerate their deployment. I therefore strongly appeal to Member States to provide the necessary support for the deployment of these units.

13. As stressed in my previous report, the deployment of personnel and contingent-owned equipment to UNAMID is a complex and time-consuming process, which is further complicated by insecurity and political uncertainty in Darfur. While ensuring that their military and police personnel are adequately trained and equipped to contribute effectively to UNAMID's operations, troop- and police-contributing countries must also work to ensure that these personnel and their contingent-owned equipment arrive in the mission area with minimum delay. The Secretariat continues to emphasize this issue with troop and police contributors as a matter of priority.

14. Recognizing the need for enhanced logistical support of the mission from outside the mission area, on 23 January 2009 UNAMID established a liaison office in Entebbe, Uganda. I would like to thank the Government of Uganda for the support it has extended to UNAMID. The office will expand considerably the logistical infrastructure and structure of UNAMID and will contribute to facilitating the implementation of its mandate.

Tripartite Committee for the deployment of UNAMID

15. The Tripartite Committee on UNAMID, consisting of representatives of the Government of the Sudan, the African Union and the United Nations, held its third periodic consultation in Addis Ababa on 19 January 2009. A memorandum of understanding on air operations was signed at the meeting, enabling UNAMID to make more effective use of Sudanese airport infrastructure in order to accelerate its deployment process. In particular, it was agreed that UNAMID would be permitted to fly its IL-76 aircraft to the newly constructed airport in El Geneina three times per week. Furthermore, the agreement on UNAMID's ability to conduct air operations around the clock from the three principal airports in Darfur was confirmed and will be implemented as facilities are upgraded. For its part, UNAMID will accelerate its work to rehabilitate the three main airports in Darfur to ensure safe and sustainable air operations.

16. During the meeting, the Government of the Sudan asked UNAMID to accelerate its capacity-building of the Sudanese police to enable it to better meet security expectations. In that context, the Government reiterated its commitment to protect the United Nations and other humanitarian actors. The Government also agreed to UNAMID's request to extend police protection to UNAMID camps in El Fasher, Nyala and El Geneina.

17. As regards a United Nations broadcast radio system for Darfur, the mission has received initial verbal approval for the allocation of a specific FM frequency pending final licensing. A note verbale officially requesting a broadcast licence for UNAMID radio was submitted on 21 January, along with all the required technical documents, to the Government of the Sudan, which has yet to respond. As this process could be quite lengthy, the issue will be followed up at the Tripartite Committee level to ensure its rapid resolution.

18. The Government of the Sudan, the African Union and the United Nations noted the progress achieved towards facilitating the deployment and operations of UNAMID in recent months and acknowledged the positive role that the Tripartite Committee had played in that regard. It was agreed that the next meeting of the Committee would be held in Khartoum during the first quarter of 2009.

III. UNAMID operations

19. The security level in Darfur remains at phase IV. In addition to the volatile and unpredictable environment in Darfur, criminal activity targeting UNAMID staff and premises continued during the reporting period and posed the greatest direct threat to UNAMID and the humanitarian community working in Darfur.

20. During the reporting period, UNAMID has put in place mitigating measures to reduce the incidence of carjacking of UNAMID vehicles. These measures include the establishment of a carjacking investigation team in El Fasher and plans to establish similar investigation teams in other sectors. In addition, as of early December, the Indonesian formed police unit has been conducting daily patrols in the vicinity of UNAMID premises in El Fasher and in strategic areas of the town. Security enhancements for El Fasher, El Geneina and Nyala supercamps are in progress.

21. Nevertheless, carjacking incidents increased significantly in Northern Darfur, in particular in El Fasher. A number of worrying developments have been recorded. One UNAMID staff member lost his life owing to injuries he sustained during a carjacking incident in El Fasher market on 27 December. Another UNAMID staff member was shot and wounded on 31 January during an attempted carjacking outside his residence in El Geneina, Western Darfur. On 16 January 2009, an explosive device was thrown into the home of a UNAMID staff member in Nyala, injuring a UNAMID police officer. Indeed, perpetrators appear to be getting bolder, targeting UNAMID in close proximity to its premises and to staff residences.

22. During the reporting period, the UNAMID military component conducted 1,325 confidence-building patrols, 1,748 village patrols, 479 escort patrols and 42 investigation patrols. UNAMID police conducted 3,806 patrols inside camps for internally displaced persons and 1,336 outside the camps.

23. During the reporting period, UNAMID continued to face restrictions on its freedom of movement. On 10 December 2008, a UNAMID patrol was blocked by Arab militia near Kile Kile (30 kilometres south of Muhajeria, Southern Darfur), who asked to be informed in advance of any patrols in the area. On 31 December, the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) denied a UNAMID patrol access to Abu Surug (30 kilometres north-west of El Geneina, Western Darfur) and prevented it from undertaking a routine assessment mission. On 28 January 2009, a UNAMID water escort patrol in Shaariya, Southern Darfur, was stopped at an SAF checkpoint and was not allowed to proceed. It was accused by the SAF commander of providing the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) with equipment and weapons. In another serious development, on the same day a UNAMID patrol was stopped by members of a Chadian armed opposition group in Manzula village, near El Geneina, Western Darfur, and was told that UNAMID must seek permission from the Government of the Sudan to move through the territory.

24. The UNAMID police component continued to expand its community policing initiative during the reporting period. UNAMID police provided training to volunteers in 61 camps for internally displaced persons in gender-based violence, human rights, child protection and the principles of community policing. Construction or upgrading of up to 17 community policing centres out of 83 is envisioned to be completed by June 2009 to enable the UNAMID police component to perform its community policing task fully.

25. At the same time, the UNAMID police component continued its training programme with the Government of the Sudan and with police liaison officers appointed by the movements. During the reporting period, UNAMID provided a range of training to Sudanese police in crime investigation, crime scene management, community policing, gender-based violence, human rights, child protection and the detention and treatment of suspects. The movements' police received courses on community policing, gender-based violence, human rights and child protection and a three-week basic policing course.

26. During the reporting period, UNAMID continued to receive reports of human rights violations and abuses. A total of 33 incidents of sexual and physical violence involving 83 victims, 15 of them minors, were documented by UNAMID; 20 victims were reportedly raped. Only 10 of the incidents were reported to the Sudanese police, because of fear of social stigma and lack of trust in local authorities to effectively investigate incidents. Out of a total of 74 perpetrators, 25 were described as wearing SAF military uniforms, 21 as members of armed militias and 24 as unknown men. The Government has reported that two soldiers of SAF were arrested in connection with these crimes.

27. During the reporting period, UNAMID also documented 21 cases of allegations of torture, ill treatment and arbitrary use of force, including lethal force. Out of a total of 10 incidents involving central reserve police, nine occurred in Tawila, Northern Darfur, where there is no presence of regular Sudanese police forces.

28. On 23 January 2009, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and UNAMID jointly issued a public report on the Government of the Sudan law enforcement operation at Kalma camp on 25 August 2008, which resulted in the killing of 33 civilians and the wounding of 108 others. The report concluded that the indiscriminate and disproportionate use of force by security

forces of the Government of the Sudan was in violation of international human rights and humanitarian law. The Government committee set up to investigate the incident has not yet released its findings. UNAMID will continue to provide a 24/7 presence around Kalma camp together with advocacy and support inside the camp, in order to prevent insecurity inside the camp, which remains volatile.

29. With regard to quick-impact projects, 22 new projects were established in Northern Darfur, bringing the total number of such projects in the three Darfur states to 99. UNAMID and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme signed a memorandum of understanding for the implementation of quick-impact projects using stabilized soil block, an environmentally sound alternative building material. UNAMID will continue to promote the use of environmentally sound technology in Darfur, given that competition over limited natural resources is one of the major causes of the conflict. The UNAMID civil affairs component also participated in the Darfur environmental technology task force to further enhance local environmental protection objectives.

30. During the reporting period, the UNAMID mine-action component visited 24 villages for a general mine-action assessment and more than 9,000 people received mine-risk education. The assessment found that unexploded ordnance continued to constitute a threat to the population of Darfur. Incidents involving unexploded ordnance injured two children in Gokar, Western Darfur on 14 December; killed one child and injured two others in Kera, Northern Darfur on 16 December; and injured three persons in Tawila, Northern Darfur on 8 January.

IV. Security situation

31. The period under review was characterized by a dramatic deterioration in the security situation across Darfur. The unilateral ceasefire announced by President Al-Bashir on 12 November 2008 at the conclusion of the Sudan People's Forum in Khartoum has not taken hold. Of major concern have been the military offensives by armed movements, especially JEM, and counter-attacks by SAF, which included the use of aerial bombardments. The reporting period has also seen fighting within several armed movements. In addition, tribal clashes over natural resources engulfed Southern Darfur on a scale not seen since early 2008.

32. In the light of the escalating violence, the need for a concerted effort towards a cessation of hostilities has become more urgent than ever and the Joint Chief Mediator has been leading African Union-United Nations efforts with the parties in this regard. In the meantime, UNAMID will continue its efforts to systematically monitor, report and investigate attacks in accordance with its mandate. It is absolutely critical for the Government of the Sudan and the movements to guarantee access for UNAMID monitoring teams to any areas where there are allegations of violence involving civilians.

33. During the reporting period, the Government reported that two large columns of JEM rebels had crossed the border from Chad into Northern Darfur on 11 December 2008, precipitating troop reinforcements on the part of SAF and aerial bombardments of strategic locations intended to avert a JEM offensive into Southern Darfur and beyond.

34. On 8 January 2009, SAF aircraft reportedly bombarded Birdik (north of Kutum, Northern Darfur) and Sani Hayi (north-west of Mallit, Northern Darfur), followed by bombing of Kalaka village (east of Khor Abeche, Southern Darfur) on 10 January and Jebel Adulla and Agara (east of Shaariya, Southern Darfur) on 12 January. On 12 January, a UNAMID investigative patrol confirmed that Kalaka village had been bombed. The same day, UNAMID reported the bombing of Muhajeria, Southern Darfur, by a white aircraft.

35. On 14 January, heavily armed JEM vehicles entered Muhajeria and on 15 January, JEM engaged in clashes with the Sudan Liberation Army/Minni Minnawi (SLA/MM) forces. Following the clashes, the SLA/MM forces retreated and JEM took control of Muhajeria and nearby Labado. UNAMID set up a makeshift hospital at its team site in Muhajeria to assist the wounded.

36. On 22 January, the reinforcement of Graida by SAF, intended to limit JEM gains in what had been SLA/MM territory, reportedly led to SAF clashing with SLA/MM and taking control of the town from SLA/MM.

37. From 22 to 24 January, in an apparent attempt to dislodge JEM, the Government conducted several aerial bombing raids in Muhajeria, which were confirmed by UNAMID. According to local residents, two bombs hit a camp for internally displaced persons leaving eight houses burnt, five damaged and a child dead. An estimated 1,000 civilians took refuge at the UNAMID camp.

38. Also on 24 January, UNAMID received unconfirmed reports that the Government of the Sudan had conducted aerial bombardments in Northern Darfur, (24 kilometres west of Haskanita and south of Umm Kadada). At least 15 people were reportedly killed in the fighting. UNAMID continues to investigate the incident.

39. On 26 and 27 January, SAF engaged an advancing JEM column 9 kilometres from the centre of El Fasher. On several occasions, heavy bombardment could be heard from the town. Also on 26 January, UNAMID confirmed that Government aerial bombardments had been conducted in Muhajeria, where 3,000 civilians gathered at the UNAMID camp for shelter and protection.

40. On 31 January and 1 February, Sudanese authorities informed UNAMID that they believed that JEM intended to initiate larger scale hostilities in Southern Darfur and that SAF would therefore use "all means possible" to dislodge JEM from the area. The Sudanese authorities further called on UNAMID to relocate personnel out of the Muhajeria team site to another location, in order to "prevent any unnecessary loss of life, similar to Haskanita". During these contacts, Government officials made clear that they viewed the area of Muhajeria as vital to the security of Southern Darfur and Kordofan.

41. In the light of these developments, intense diplomatic efforts were undertaken in Khartoum and Addis Ababa, in the margins of the African Union Summit, to convince the Government and JEM to stand down, including a meeting between myself and President Al-Bashir at the Summit. During these contacts, the United Nations called on the Government of the Sudan to exercise maximum restraint and to abide by existing agreements, including with respect to the safety and security of African Union-United Nations personnel. The response received from the most senior levels of the Government was that restraint would be exercised and that UNAMID would not be asked to depart from Muhajeria, a situation that would have implied suspending the mission's mandated activities in the area. President Al-Bashir

also gave his personal assurance that he would make every effort to ensure the safety of civilians in the Muhajeria area and the safety and integrity of UNAMID's team site there.

42. Following similarly intense engagement with JEM leadership, by 3 February JEM withdrew its forces approximately 50 to 60 kilometres outside of Muhajeria.

43. However, in a disturbing development that same day, a senior delegation led by the UNAMID Deputy Force Commander was prevented from travelling to Muhajeria by Government security officials on the ground that the security situation was dangerous. The delegation aimed to assess the security situation and reinforcement needs of the UNAMID team site. This represents a clear infraction of the status-of-forces agreement between UNAMID and the Government of the Sudan, which guarantees UNAMID full and unrestricted freedom of movement without delay throughout Darfur.

44. In addition to the crisis in the Muhajeria area, tribal fighting remained a key destabilizing factor in the security environment in Southern Darfur. On 25 December 2008, a group of 150 armed men believed to be from the Salamat and Fallata tribes attacked the Habaniya and Abu Darak nomadic communities in the western part of Wad Hagam, Southern Darfur. Five civilians, including one woman, were reportedly killed and 536 cattle were looted during the attack. The attack followed two other incidents between the tribes: on 4 December 2008, 20 Fallata men were allegedly killed by Habaniya tribesmen in Al-Tomat; and on 11 December 2008, 28 members of the Habaniya tribe were reportedly killed when a group of approximately 700 armed men from the Salamat and Fallata tribes launched a counter-attack on Wad Hagam village. During a mission to the area on 17 December 2008, UNAMID observed that at least 80 per cent of the village settlement, including houses and shops, had burned down. Since 25 December, UNAMID has provided active support, including logistical assistance, to the reconciliation conference between the tribes initiated by local government.

45. In addition, from 6 to 8 December 2008, clashes between the North Gimir and South Gimir tribes in Antakina village, 150 kilometres south of Nyala, Southern Darfur, resulted in the death of approximately 20 people, mostly community leaders from the South Gimir. On 7 January 2009, the fighting again erupted between the two tribes, reportedly killing 10 people.

46. These clashes arise from long-standing disputes over land jurisdiction and local authority between the groups in a context of proliferation of firearms, the absence of law and order and precarious economic conditions. The clashes underline the need for improved local governance and dispute resolution mechanisms and social and economic development.

47. In Zalingei, Western Darfur, tension increased between armed nomads and internally displaced persons around the Hassa Hissa camp for internally displaced persons. On 1 December 2008, two internally displaced persons were shot and injured by an armed nomad, who was then severely beaten by internally displaced persons and died the following morning at the Zalingei hospital. The reaction of armed nomads resulted in the shooting of three IDPs, including one child, on 2 December 2008. The rapid deployment of UNAMID and SAF, as well as close cooperation between all UNAMID sections in Zalingei and the local authorities, contributed to the successful resolution of the conflict and prevented its further escalation.

V. Humanitarian situation

48. Continued violence during the reporting period increased the vulnerability of civilians in Darfur, while additional population displacements increased the number of people dependent on life-saving assistance. In 2008, some 317,000 displacements occurred (compared with 300,000 in 2007), bringing the total number of displaced individuals in Darfur above 2.7 million.

49. As a result of the violence, humanitarian organizations have had to reduce movements by road and rely increasingly on air assets. Relief and early recovery programmes nevertheless continued throughout the reporting period, including distribution of food and non-food items such as blankets to aid-dependent communities, as well as education, health and water and sanitation programmes.

50. At the same time, restrictions on air operations prevented the free movement of life-saving assistance, including on 28 December 2008 when all flights of the World Food Programme were cancelled for the day by the Government's Humanitarian Aid Commission. In Southern Darfur, state authorities continued to hinder the delivery of fuel needed to power water pumps in camps for internally displaced persons. At the federal level, many non-governmental organizations and United Nations organizations continue to struggle to get visas for their staff within the time agreed under the Government's General Directorate for Procedures.

51. The humanitarian community also continued to be a frequent target of violent acts during the reporting period, when 22 vehicles were hijacked, 4 humanitarian workers were abducted and 11 humanitarian premises were broken into. It is of deep concern that 2008 figures show an almost doubling of the number of violent attacks on humanitarian aid workers compared with the previous year. In 2008, a total of 277 humanitarian vehicles were hijacked (compared with 137 in 2007), 218 humanitarian personnel were abducted (147 in 2007), 192 humanitarian premises were attacked (93 in 2007) and 36 staff members were wounded (24 in 2007). In 2008, 11 staff members were killed, with four still missing (13 died in 2007). These statistics are a stark reminder of the risks taken and the bravery shown by the aid community working throughout Darfur.

52. Despite these challenges, there have been some positive developments, in that most of Darfur received sufficient rainfall, allowing more people than in previous years to cultivate land. Consequently, the harvests in Western and Southern Darfur are expected to have been better in 2008 than in 2007. As the rainy season ended across Darfur, the seasonal nomadic movement recommenced. Increased Sudanese police deployment to agricultural areas to protect the harvest and community mobilization, including through the creation of security committees to facilitate agreement on nomadic routes, also ensured a lower level of conflict along these routes than in previous years.

VI. Political process

53. During the reporting period, progress in the political process was impeded by the military action of JEM, resumption of aerial bombardments by the Government and the general sense that all concerned were waiting for the decision of the International Criminal Court regarding the Prosecutor's application for an arrest warrant against President Al-Bashir. In this context, the position of the main parties

has not changed. SLA/Abdul Wahid continued to reject the possibility of dialogue with the Government of the Sudan; JEM continued to claim it was ready for direct negotiations with the Government, but its actions on the ground, in particular its 15 January attack on SLA/MM in Muhajeria, signalled an intention to focus on military action. In addition, JEM continued to reject the inclusion of other movements in the peace talks. Furthermore, the fighting between the Government of the Sudan forces and SLA/MM in Graida could jeopardize the security and political arrangements between the Government of the Sudan and SLA/MM.

54. In the follow-up to the Sudan People's Forum launched by President Al-Bashir in October 2008, the President paid a visit to Darfur on 23 December, inaugurating newly constructed Government buildings and conducting a rally in the village of Sewelinga near El Fasher, which was built by the Government as a model village intended for the voluntary resettlement of Darfurians displaced by the conflict.

55. The President subsequently issued decrees on 21 January 2009 establishing three committees to deal with fundamental issues related to the conflict in Darfur, namely a committee for assessing the administrative structure of Darfur states, a committee for the follow-up on reconciliation conferences, and a committee on native administration. It will be crucial for the committees to deliver tangible outcomes in order to gain trust among the people of Darfur.

56. As at 31 January, the recommendations of the Sudan People's Forum had yet to be taken forward by the Government in direct negotiations with the armed movements, as envisaged. Moreover, some of the parties that participated in the inaugural meeting of the Forum have since publicly expressed their concern with regard to the credibility of the initiative. In addition, prospects for the participation of the Popular Congress Party in the Forum were seriously undermined with the arrest of the Party's leader, Hassan Al-Turabi, on 15 January, following his remarks in support of the process at the International Criminal Court against President Al-Bashir two days earlier.

57. On 14 January, the ad hoc Afro-Arab ministerial committee on resolving the Darfur crisis met in Doha. The Prime Minister of Qatar, Hamad bin Jassem bin Jabr Al-Thani, opened the meeting, which was attended by official representatives from Algeria, Burkina Faso, Chad, the Congo, Egypt, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Morocco, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, South Africa, the Syrian Arab Republic and the United Republic of Tanzania. Also present were the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Jean Ping, the Commissioner of the African Union Peace and Security Council, Ramtane Lamara, and the Deputy Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, Ahmad Bin Helli, as well as the African Union-United Nations Joint Chief Mediator for Darfur, Djibrill Bassolé. In his address to the meeting, the Chief Mediator provided an update on his work with the main parties and the Government of Qatar on a framework agreement and expressed his intention to convene a meeting with the parties as soon as possible. The statement issued by the participants in the ministerial meeting endorsed the efforts of Mr. Bassolé and the Government of Qatar to facilitate the resumption of peace talks in Doha. The statement called upon Qatar, the African Union and the League of Arab States to send a delegation to New York to discuss with members of the Security Council the suspension of all Darfur International Criminal Court cases in the interest of the peace process.

58. All participants in the meeting expressed concern about the possible negative impact on the peace process of an International Criminal Court arrest warrant against President Al-Bashir. Mr. Bassolé urged participants in the meeting to press the parties to sign the framework agreement as soon as possible in order to build momentum and provide a platform for dialogue and continued engagement following the International Criminal Court decision.

59. Indeed, while the overarching objective of a framework agreement is to establish the parameters for the final peace talks, an immediate consequence of its signing would be an improvement in the security situation through a cessation of hostilities, provided the parties comply with the terms of the agreement. An initial meeting between the Government and JEM is scheduled to take place in the first half of February, although the recent clashes in Southern Darfur have put that plan in jeopardy.

60. Given the recent escalation and the dynamics of the conflict so far, it is inconceivable that the agreement can be signed without the support and direct engagement of all Member States with influence over the parties. I urge these countries to rise to their responsibility in this regard.

VII. Observations

61. The escalation in the level of violence in Darfur signals an investment in conflict rather than a serious commitment to peaceful negotiations. I deplore the violence and its consequences for the civilian population, and I reiterate my condemnation of JEM's attack on Muhajeria and the Government of the Sudan's use of aerial bombardments. I urge the Government to refrain from the use of offensive military flights and call on all parties to refrain from attacks on civilian areas. In connection with the recent fighting and keeping in mind the findings of the report on the Kalma incident, I remind all parties of their responsibilities under international humanitarian law to ensure the safety and security of civilians, African Union-United Nations personnel and aid workers in Darfur.

62. With limited capability at its disposal, over the reporting period UNAMID has nevertheless been able to make a difference on the ground. I applaud the efforts of UNAMID and troop-contributing countries in reaching 60 per cent of military deployment on 31 December 2008 in the face of enormous difficulties, including the volatile security situation in Darfur. The sustained cooperation of the Government of the Sudan during the past few months has been important in achieving this level of deployment. It will also be extremely important for troop and police contributors, in some cases with support from donor countries, to accelerate their preparations and readiness to deploy. If this does not take place, we will not meet our deployment targets.

63. I am confident that much more will be achieved once the mission reaches full operating capability. As we go forward, however, an important requirement will be to consolidate the capabilities of the troops currently on the ground. The provision of outstanding equipment, in particular military helicopter assets, remains critical to increasing the mobility and operational impact of the mission. I reiterate my appeal to Member States who are in a position to provide these mission-critical capabilities to do so without further delay.

64. At the same time, the latest security developments highlight, once again, the fundamental challenges that UNAMID continues to face while operating in an environment where the parties show no intent to give up the use of force, and further underscore the urgent need for a comprehensive settlement to the Darfur crisis. In the meantime, UNAMID continues to balance the dual priorities of continuing with deployment in order to better implement its mandate, while minimizing risk to personnel in a phase IV security environment. The approach being taken is to give short-term emphasis to measures designed to enhance the safety and security of personnel (including improved security measures at team sites), agreement on which staff are essential, and ensuring supplies and other provisions are in place so that personnel can sustain operations for a reasonable period in the event of a serious deterioration in the security situation. At the same time, deployment will continue in the case of military and police units and individuals that contribute directly to the mission's ability to protect civilians and its personnel and assets.

65. Ultimately, the fundamental responsibility for making progress lies with the parties. It is the Government of the Sudan and the armed rebel movements that must cease hostilities and engage in dialogue under the auspices of the African Union-United Nations mediation. It is the Government that must take concrete actions to demonstrate its seriousness with respect to the outcomes of the Sudan People's Forum; and it is critical for regional stability and lasting peace in Darfur that the Governments of Chad and the Sudan improve relations.

66. In the aftermath of the violence in Muhajeria, it is clear that the parties do not have the will or capacity to transcend this conflict alone. I call on Member States with influence over the parties to engage actively in support of Joint Chief Mediator Bassolé's efforts to work with the parties towards a negotiated political solution.

67. With respect to the 14 July 2008 application by the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court for an arrest warrant against President Al-Bashir, the United Nations respects the independence of the Court and its judicial process, and stresses its determination to remain engaged in the search for a solution to the conflict. Our peacekeeping operations and mediation, humanitarian and development work in the Sudan will continue in an impartial manner. To this end, while recognizing the importance of both peace and justice to the search for a solution in Darfur, Member States have the responsibility to encourage the Government of the Sudan to react responsibly to the International Criminal Court decision, and to engage with the Sudan in a way that brings forward the possibility of a political solution to the conflict.